

AUG 49

LET'S EXPLORE--

Old Canal Country



Brush and camera artists find this scene near Point Pleasant (Pa.) one of their favorite subjects. Old water wheel, still used in an emergency to generate electricity, once supplied all of current to house in background.

Staff Photos, Dorer



On bank of canal at New Hope artists set up easels to record impressions of bridge beside weeping willow.

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

If you have a canvas just waiting for a fit subject, a camera loaded for the right moment or merely an eye for beauty, the place for you is the West bank of the Delaware River. You'll find artists and lovers of quiet beauty have long since beaten you to the spot—but there's enough natural artistry in a unique trip along the Delaware Division (Lehigh) Canal to meet the needs of anyone.

Scores of artists working along the Delaware Valley should come as no surprise; it is inevitable that they should be there. Perhaps nowhere else are unlimited subjects grouped so closely.

Old stone houses, mills, the canal with its perfectly preserved locks, the Delaware River, quarries rising sheerly from the road—all of this artistic stock in trade is there. The roads are good and the route is varied enough to suit even the most jaded tastes: If the motorist can shrug off nature, then he surely can't so lightly dismiss the canal. It is one of the East's best preserved mementos of a dying transportation era.

Mule-drawn barges loaded with coal floated up and down the canal until 1931. Conch shells blown by barge men sounded both greeting and warning at locks along the way and lock tenders stepped from tiny huts to swing the gates open or shut to move the vessels along. The trip from just below Easton to Bristol, Pa., near Trenton, was long but the way was exciting. Hotels did a thriving business, and at night tiny villages rang with merriment or with angry voices, depending on whether canalers were gathering or brawling.

THEN came the railroads and the canal found operations—so profitable when the waterway was dug in 1828

—no longer merited the expense of maintenance. For several years barge parties used the canal, floating under moonlit skies to the accompaniment of plunking ukeleles or blended voices. Then a flood washed away a flume near Point Pleasant (Pa.), water ebbed from the southern half and the canal fell victim to sprouting grass and brush. This bit of Americana seemed doomed.

Now, however, the Pennsylvania State Legislature has appropriated \$200,000 for restoration of the waterway. Plans for a great recreational area, to be known as Roosevelt State Park, are nearly complete. It won't be used for navigation, although canoeists and small boatmen will probably be permitted to use the waters and pleasure barges may again summon lock tenders. The canal will be stocked with fish to bring back memories of sunny days spent hauling catfish from canal waters. The old towpath, 14 feet wide of the eastern bank of the canal, will be converted into a trail for hikers and horseback riders and all along the way picnic grounds will be provided.

Flemington is a logical starting point for this trip to the artist's paradise. Three successive traffic circles at Flemington are cleared by following "Frentchtown" signs. Beyond the third circle fields stretch so far and so regularly on either side of the road that the illusion is one of flatlands. This is high country, however, the proof becoming sharply apparent at the sudden drop into the valley beyond Baptistown. Quickly the horizon clears and a magnificent hilltop view of the Delaware River valley is offered.

In the valley, about a mile East of

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Water drips from wooden sluiceway (above, left) of canal as it crosses Tinicum Creek near Erwinna. At Uhlerstown is one of the locks (above, right) with wooden shed used by lock-tenders. Between lock and shed is gear-box used to operate gate of waterway.



A curve in the road at Phillip mill (left) now used as community center.

DELAWARE VALLEY COUNTRY

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Frenchtown, is one of the state's most unusual brooks, flowing over a solid rock bottom worn smooth by countless years of flowing water. One of the banks is a solid stone formation, apparently softer than the creek bed because the eddying force when the brook is rampaging at high level has smoothed the rock in pleasantly round curves. Normally the water merely trickles from the mountain, but residents say a heavy rain will quickly raise the brook three or four feet.

AN old hotel at the far end of a bridge is the welcome to Frenchtown, a typical Delaware River community. Interest of the town naturally centers on the river, according to Sidney A. Da Costa, editor of the lively Delaware Valley News. He says:

"Our front page must always have a story about the river. Even if it's only an old bottle some kid finds floating we feature it. Otherwise folks ask, 'what's the matter with the river?'"

Frenchtown took its name from Paul Henri Mallet-Prevost, erroneously believed to have been a Frenchman. Actually he was born in Switzerland, but he fled from France in 1793 when he learned his name had neared the top of the list prepared by the guillotine-mad French Revolutionists. Prevost first went to Berne, Switzerland, but took to his heels again when he was thought to be a French spy. He reached this country in June, 1794, bought 800 acres along the Delaware and built solidly the foundations of Frenchtown.

On the hills surrounding Frenchtown is one of the state's centers of chicken hatching. Each year millions of baby chicks are sent through the town's post office to distant points and two of poultry grower's most radical advances in recent years, chick sexing and artificial insemination, were pioneered on these hills.

The bridge at the far end of Frenchtown's main street dominates the town, but the houses along the way are interesting. On the right, buildings are all joined together about halfway down the street and tiny balconies overhang the sidewalk. Different, too, are the ornate screen doors on many of the buildings. The bridge, dedicated in 1931, replaces two previous wooden spans, swept away by the Delaware on one of its rampages.

AT the far end of the bridge, turn

left, then immediately beyond, turn right for Uhlerstown, one of the busiest hamlets in the booming days of the canal and now perhaps the most picturesque along the route. Uhlerstown slumbers quietly beneath cliffs along the canal, dreaming of the century during which the canal helped maintain a thriving store, a hotel, barns for tow mules, a coal business and homes for those who served the waterway.

Uhlerstown seems almost to be awaiting the return of the barges. Its covered wooden bridge over the canal is perfectly preserved, the wooden locks still work and water flows sluggishly through the ditch. Colorful is the story of the "funeral" of the barges the day the canal was "interred." Local residents speak of "Wide Waters," the spot about a mile below the village where barges were towed and then pushed up a small contributing stream. There they were left to rot, once in full view but now decently covered by thick brush.

Across the bridge is most of the canal town. The old hotel has long since been converted into an artist's studio and other houses are now Summer homes in the transition of Uhlerstown from canal pre-eminence to a haunt for artists and camera fans. By turning right across the bridge a circuit can be made through the village and back to the main road. Past the big house with the ornate iron filigree work on the porch the road passes through a rambling red barn,



Typical view along the old canal with the Delaware River at right.



Rocky bottom of this brook near Frenchtown is smooth as glass.



Uhlerstown's covered bridge has "road" which appears to have been oddity is sign reading "barn is"



Phillips Mills, named after old grist mill, now community center and art exhibit hall.



A break in the canal (above, left) south of Point Pleasant (Pa.) where sluiceway was carried off by flood. Stone pillars in foreground are part of state rebuilding project. Above: The new footbridge across the Delaware at Lumberville replaced a wooden span.

FAVORITE SPOT OF ARTISTS

built after the road and constructed over the right-of-way.

A sign on the barn gives one of the country's most unique warnings to motorists:

"This barn is unsafe. Proceed at your own risk."

The sign continues by saying the road was "closed to traffic after May 17, 1947," but traffic still goes through, recognizing that the warning is more to protect the barn owner than the driving public.

BYOND the barn the road is pitted and rocky but readily passable and the trip is worthwhile. Willows weep profusely, perhaps for the lamented canal. Along the left a solid rock ledge rises high above the road, its red outcroppings eroded by centuries of dripping water. A right turn at the macadam leads to the highway where another right turn is made to resume the trip to New Hope.

The canal flows to the right, out of sight for a few miles until it is crossed on a wooden bridge. Then it is on the left and close to the highway most of the way to New Hope. Just past the bridge crossing is one of the sluiceway arrangements which carried the canal across wide streams. The wooden sluiceway (or flume) is still in good condition, carrying the canal's clay-colored waters slowly across Tinicum Creek. Water volume is sufficient to keep the level unaffected by the water dripping profusely through leaks in the bottom.

This is the most pleasant part of the canal, mainly because the water is still present. Locks can be seen at intervals and often gates along the left bank are sighted. These were opened during periods of high water to permit the overflow to empty into the Delaware River. All the way to Point Pleasant the road, the canal and the river are side by side.

An "S" curved street carries through Point Pleasant and as the "S" straightens out, a look to the left will reveal why the canal no longer flows all the way to Bristol. Water falls rapidly from the canal bed where the sluiceway across the creek was swept away by a flood. The state has already built several stone pillars across the creek bottom but work on the sluiceway is slow. When this is replaced water can again flow throughout the canal.

THE Delaware River becomes rough to the left as the road winds upward through a thick forest whose 100-foot evergreens cushion all noise. Then, at Lumberville, the shining new footbridge across the Delaware appears. The span was completed in June to replace an old wooden bridge across the river to Raven Rock on the Jersey side. It is probably one of the longest bridges in the country devoted exclusively to foot traffic. Footings for the bridge are wide enough, however, to permit widening the bridge to auto mobile size if the need ever arises.

Phillips Mills sets the stage for the entrance into artistic New Hope. There can be no mistaking Phillips Mills; the road curves sharply around the corner of the old grist mill, now used as a community center and twice a year the scene of local art exhibits. The tiny village is huddled around the mill and its lovely old stone houses have been many times transferred to an artist's canvas. Beyond lies New Hope.

There is much to see in New Hope, the center of all Delaware Valley artistic endeavor, where the dignity and the timelessness of the old stone houses have absorbed the influx of artists. Here the muses are pursued in non-Bohemian atmosphere. There is no suggestion of struggling in garrets, of existences on crumbs. Young art unquestionably finds the going in New Hope as tough as it is anywhere else, but the Colonial air of the community permits no flaunting of temperament. New Hope seems greater than the sum of the artists.

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Uhlerstown's covered bridge over canal with locks in center rear.



Boys swim in old mill race in front of Bucks County Playhouse.



companion piece in a "covered in cut through a barn. Another unsafe. Proceed at own risk."



LET'S EXPLORE Old Canal Country

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Shortly after 1700 a ferry across the Delaware linked twin villages on the New Jersey and Pennsylvania sides, both called Coryell's Mills after the owner of grist mills. Then, in 1790, fire swept the Pennsylvania side and as residents began to build they called their village New Hope. The town kept the crooked, hilly streets and automobile traffic today finds its pace slowed. However, the antique shops, the artist supply houses, the stone buildings, the printing shops and the artists themselves would slow traffic even if the roads were broad and smooth. New Hope is worth being slow about.

ABOUT 50 artists now paint professionally near New Hope and their numbers are swelled during the Summer by hundreds of amateur pallet wielders. The other arts also love the valley and many writers, musicians, actors and theatrical person-

ages have flocked to Bucks County.

New Hope's Summer focal point is Bucks County Playhouse, now in its 10th season of presenting exceptional Summer stock. A new play is given every week of the 15-week season with "name" actors assuming leading roles. The theater, site of a pre-Revolutionary War grist mill, uses local people whenever possible and usually employs local props. Complete with a revolving stage, the theater has 422 seats and plays always to capacity audiences.

The Delaware River at New Hope served to link the Delaware Division Canal and the feeder canal on the Jersey side. Boats transferred to the feeder canal for a trip down the Jersey side of the river to a junction near Trenton with the Delaware and Raritan Canal.

The New Jersey "Coryell's Mills" became Lambertville and this is the way home. The town, largest in Hunterdon County, was carved from the wilderness in 1705 at the terminus on the Delaware of an old Indian trail. Brothers by the name of Lambert settled there about 1735 and gave the town its name. Route 202 cuts through Lambertville and rises to the hills beyond for a quick and pleasant return to Flemington and North Jersey.

Explorer's map of tour taking in the west bank of the Delaware.



New Hope's public library in one of town's oldest buildings.